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ABSTRACT

Institutional retrenchment is an on-going process in academia. So that crises can be avoided in the retrenchment process, every institution should develop processes both for the continual review of units by faculty colleagues and to ensure faculty participation in the management of the institution. Decisions about retrenchment should be based on criteria that departments may use to defend themselves. The best way to protect a department from being retrenched, or to defend it once an evaluative process is underway, is to maintain an image of a quality department closely connected to the work of other departments on the campus and to the overall mission of the institution. Disciplinary associations, such as the Association for Communication Administration, can contribute to forestalling retrenchment by providing (1) a body of scholarship and research that can be identified; (2) publication outlets; (3) the "refereeing," so important in attesting to quality; (4) conventions for papers to be presented; (5) committees, policy bodies, and other mechanisms by which problems may be posed; and (6) offices to put on vitas. The responsibility of the retrenchment review process, however, ultimately falls to the department. The department should cooperate in making available relevant data, requested and not requested, as well as assure and assert its right to respond and to appeal adverse decisions. In doing so, the department should call on the associations and others to help. Outside help can be helpful for maintaining the morale of the department under attack. (HOD)

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RETRENCHMENT, THE DEPARTMENT, AND THE ASSOCIATION

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The spectre of retrenchment is abroad in academia. Given the headlines in The Chronicle of Higher Education, reductions in monetary and public support, the looming decline in the college-age cohort, there is ample reason to worry. We all know instances where departments from various disciplines have been under attack. Some few have been eliminated, some have been restructured, many have lost programs and courses and will lose tenured faculty through attrition and non-tenured by rapid termination of employment.

Three topics relative to retrenchment, the department and the disciplinary association are my focus: 1) the retrenchment process itself; 2) the role of the professional/scholarly association's contributions in forestalling retrenchment of departments; and 3) the role of associations once the retrenchment issue is joined with respect to a specific department. While many of my comments have general applicability, my emphasis is upon Speech Communication as the discipline and the ACA and SCA as the disciplinary associations.

Institutional Retrenchment Processes

Retrenchment is a nasty word but a word with which we and our institutions must come to terms. Retrenchment is too often viewed as the complete elimination of an instructional unit and associated staff. More often retrenchment actually turns out to be an extensive and intensive review of alternative ways

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of achieving reductions in spending through reduction in staff (both immediately and long-term) and curtailment of programs and course offerings or reorganization of existing units.

Retrenchment usually is the result of immediate or projected long-term shortfalls in resources. It may arise with a recission or major reduction in anticipated funds either through lowered appropriations from the state or other taxing unit or a marked decline in tuition income.

Restructuring and reorganization of programs is an on-going process in academia. Changes in the discipline, shifts in demand, new areas of knowledge produce declines in one discipline and an upsurge in another. Some enrollment shifts are cyclical, engineering for example. Think of the major change in speech as a discipline from its inception as a modern addition to the curriculum in the early part of the century with major alterations continuing to this day. Administrators and faculty can manage change so long as it proceeds at a known, relatively stable, not too rapid rate. But the great expansion due to shifts caused by World War II and the Korean War, the baby boom, the increased proportion of college-age students attending college, the increased attendance of women with new career aspirations all contributed to rapid growth in enrollment and resources for higher education in the 1960's and into the 1970's. Many assumed an ever-expanding educational system and we built decision-making structures fitting expansion. Currently, the largest enrollment ever in higher education is matched with a major economic decline and dramatic loss of support from state and federal sources. The future cannot be bright for various programs at many institutions given the decline in college-age students and the

shift in vocational choices. We will be at best in steady-state and in many cases facing a continuous erosion in attendance and support.

Institutions must differentiate between the short-term financial emergency and the long-term continued erosion of resources. Short-term financial stress should not result in hasty, major changes in the structure of the university. To respond to a temporary shortfall by drastically altering the nature of the university without adequate participation of faculty and staff is idiocy.

Instead, institutions should develop methods by which faculty participate in the determination of the nature and degree of the severity of the crisis as well as determining responses. The faculty must be responsible for the educational policy decisions that alter the university on a permanent basis. It is the faculty, not the managers, that have the requisite expertise to make educational policy decisions.

I recognize the many objections and complications. Faculty do not want to participate in the tough decisions, the administration does not want to share power, the institution does not have a tradition of shared governance. But colleges and universities will be required to restructure. Every institution should be developing processes for the continual review of units by faculty colleagues and processes to ensure faculty participation in the management of the institution so that crises can be avoided. Plans need to be established now if the institution of tenure and all the values it holds for the educational enterprise are to be protected. Often new legislation, new contract language, new programs and procedures need to be developed that permit greater career counseling, early retirement options, proper balance of faculty and staff, adequate

tenure procedures, mid-term planning, etc. Procedural considerations and protections for faculty, staff, students and the institution are more likely to be adequate if developed with sufficient time for reflection and evaluation rather than in a crisis atmosphere in which the perception of many is only whether she loses her job, department or program or I lose mine.

Decisions about retrenchment need to be made in terms of the mission of the institution. Clearly, then, criteria and weighting of criteria will vary. But the following list is suggestive of criteria that have been employed. The list also suggests bases on which departments may defend their unit or particular programs and activities within the unit.

1. Relationship to mission and function of university/campus/college
2. Quality of programs
    a. Faculty in terms of scholarship, research, professional visibility
    b. Teaching and curricular program
    c. Quality of student in program
3. Centrality
    a. Connectedness (often in terms of service to other programs/units)
    b. Intellectual centrality
4. Cost as compared to other programs
    a. At the institution
    b. At other institutions
    c. Compared to income/other resources generated
5. Ability to generate support
    a. Revenues generated via program itself

b. Outside funding grants and donations, endowments

c. Political/alumni pressures

d. Disciplinary pressure

6. Societal needs (linked to but also differentiated from economic demands)

7. Economic demand

a. Student enrollment pressures

b. Jobs/market for graduates

8. Timing: retirement, leadership shift, vacancies, money easily available (targets of opportunity)

9. Comparable program available at another (public) institution. This raises issues about the total system of higher education within a state and could involve such issues as "What does it mean to be a comprehensive university?" and "Shall other colleges be sacrificed to maintain a comprehensive university?"

10. Intellectual/disciplinary shifts

11. Ease of restructuring/recombining/reorganizing

12. Duplication among programs internally

Association Contributions in Forestalling Retrenchment

Retrenchment decisions sometimes involve review of every unit. More typically particular units are selected on some basis ranging from caprice of an administrator or committee to prior reviews of quality, statistical indices, attracting attention by proposing a change. The best way to protect oneself from being seen as a retrenchable unit or to defend oneself once an evaluative process is underway is to maintain an image of a quality department closely

connected to the work of other units on the campus and to the overall mission of the institution. The disciplinary association inevitably plays the major role in the judgment of being a quality department.

What does the association provide? It provides identification as a discipline. It names the discipline both for those within and without. It provides the hallmarks of academic respectability: a body of scholarship and research that can be identified; publication outlets; the "refereeing" so important in attesting to quality; conventions for papers to be presented and hard; all kinds of committees, policy bodies, mechanisms by which problems may be posed, studied and solutions provided; offices to put on vita; naming of editors who name editorial boards. In short, the disciplinary association makes available a public record of scholarly/professional activity in all its various forms and manifestations. Do not forget the awards, prizes, recognitions, the top three, the top five, the golden anniversary award, etc., that are so valued by promotion committees and the institution itself. Some people assume all these things are relevant only to the research institutions. Hogwash! They are as relevant to AAUP category three institutions.

There are specific helps available through the Association for Communication Administration. Their journal is probably more useful for the person in an administrative role than Communication Monographs is for the cutting edge scholar, in part because far more of the articles will be germane to interests and needs. The ACA has also developed its version of the "AAUP Redbook" which pulls together key documents and papers relative to higher education. The ACA publishes a set of Official Guidelines on such things as workload equivalency,

evaluation of department heads, evaluation of non-traditional faculty, statements on hiring, retention, tenure. These documents are referential bases to use in justification for other administrative levels within the institution and help the administrator, novice or skilled.

Of course, departments carry their destiny in their own hands. No outside help can compensate for inadequate internal leadership and activity. If the library does not subscribe to journals; if people do not attend conventions; if people are not members of professional associations, if people are not exerting leadership in the discipline (in any of the various ways open to them); if people are not publishing, presenting, active; no association can save them from the inevitable judgment of non-quality. One outside evaluator told me he always checked the library to see what disciplinary journals were available, how much use they were given and who was published in them. He claimed it was the best first approximation of quality of the department he had found.

Believe me, the professional/disciplinary association and the activities it makes available are essential to being perceived as a discipline. And activity in an association is one key identifiable indicator of department quality or lack of it. Sit on a few college or campus promotion committees, study the five-year review reports, study the data collected by outside or inside evaluation teams. For the most part the information about quality reported and reviewed comes from the activities in and recognition by or through the professional association and the journals published by the association.

The Retrenchment Review Process

Responsibility for protecting the educational programs and activities as well as the faculty of the department during a retrenchment review ultimately falls to the department. Hopefully, the rights of the unit and its faculty and students and careful procedural safeguards will have been established by prior faculty action. Decisions about retrenchment of the unit should be largey the responsibility of faculty colleagues advising the administration. If proper procedures and faculty participation are not the case, the process should be challenged as unacceptable whatever the decision. Further, the department must have the right to know the basis of the decision, to respond with alternative information and arguments as well as alternative solutions.

The department must be sensitive to the apparent and the real basis for the possible retrenchment. For some concerns, common cause should be made with all faculty and units in the institution. Protection of tenure and proper safeguards for non-tenured personnel and students are of concern to every sensible faculty member. Assurance of proper procedure and sensible evaluation activity is of concern to every unit, now targeted or not. And the department must be aware that some changes may be necessary. The University of Illinois is being asked by the Illinois Board of Higher Education to consider eliminating a Ph.D. program in Portuguese. Several faculty have said, "Oppose at all costs. Refuse to move one step. Why cooperate in our execution?" This is a program with one faculty member and no student in the program since 1978. Is this the place to stand one's ground on principle? What principle is it? In short, given tight times tough decisions may need to be made--alternatives to elimination are usually more reasonable than elimination.

Stonewalling is not the answer. The department should cooperate in making available relevant data, requested and not requested, as well as assure and assert its right to respond and to appeal adverse decisions. This is not to suggest that the department cooperate in its own demise. Rather, it is to say that often the review is searching and well-motivated and the need to make some very tough decisions all too apparent. The haste to cut units may become less popular as institutions realize that immediate savings from such action are almost nil; several years normally elapse before real savings result. So the hated phrase of "cost-benefits analysis" may suggest that cooperative action to restructure and reallocate scarce resources is the rational solution for all.

But what can the association do to help? Even at this late date the association can be helpful. But if faculty members have not been taking advantage of the opportunities tied to the association in the past, chances of doing much now are slim. The association cannot do for you what you did not do for yourself. Nor can the discipline take on the role of the AAUP in protecting tenure, assuring due process, establishing guidelines on financial exigency, etc. Use the AAUP resources (or your union contract) for those areas in which they are ready, willing and able to lend support and do battle.

The ACA provides a list of "Departmental Strategies" accompanied by bibliographical resources for departments in stress situations. The material is helpful on everything from justification of disciplinary enterprises to specific advice for institutions such as to contact the AAUP if tenure is threatened. A telephone call to Robert Hall and William Work at the ACA and SCA National Offices will be useful. They not only will send the strategies packet and offer advice about specific inquiries, but also they can lead you to other departments

which have faced similar problems. Calls to those departments will elicit advice about strategies they employed or at least considered and perhaps rejected. Adjustment to specific circumstances is a key factor. Going public or getting alumni to write may be very helpful in some instances, working within the academic community may be the sensible way to proceed in other instances. Copies of statements of justification used at other institutions can be most helpful. Outside evaluators and reviews may be helpful both in the review as to whether the department will be retrenched and (less helpful to be sure) after the initial decision has been made and is being appealed. Further, outside support is helpful for maintaining the morale of the unit under attack.

Consultants available through the ACA Service or other individuals can be helpful in working out alternatives. Sometimes a specific way of doing things should not be defended but the centrality of the discipline and department to the scope and mission of the University is an argument that can be strongly made. Outside expertise can be particularly helpful in seeing beyond the commitments and justifications we all build up over time and in recommending acceptable alternatives. The fight is for the chance to preserve the essentials and retain the basis for good health and ability to adapt to future needs. We may not like to admit it, but there is a lot we can do without--oh, not without costs and some pain--and still perform as a quality department doing quality work in fulfilling our responsibilities in teaching, research, and service.

Association staff and officers can provide letters of support, suggestions for resources to tap in justification/response to specific assertions or probes. Many published materials in the ACA Journal, Communication Education and Speech

Teacher can be very helpful including survey results and statements of importance of oral communication skills.

The response of many institutions in making unwise retrenchment decisions is an indication of inadequate faculty participation in institutional governance. Further, the department that is not active and respected on its own campus becomes an easy target of opportunity for retrenchment. Developing ties with colleagues across the University is exceedingly difficult once you are a target. Similarly, failure to use the disciplinary associations as a means of being fully active means little evidence can be found from within your own discipline that says this is a good, respectable, quality program/department. In this age of specialization, colleagues in other departments may not know of your worth but if your discipline does not have "indicators" of your quality you invite trouble.

Once the battle is joined the association and your colleagues can give various kinds of help only if it is not already too late.